



## WHITTLESEY CREEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

# WATERFOWL HUNTING PLAN

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) is located in Bayfield County in Northern Wisconsin along Lake Superior (Figure 1). The purpose of the Refuge is for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources. The Refuge will protect and restore coastal wetland and stream habitats that are utilized by migratory trout and salmon from Lake Superior and by migratory birds. The Refuge will protect, restore, and manage coastal wetland and spring-fed stream habitat. Up to 540 acres of coastal wetland and upland will be acquired in fee title and up to 1240 acres will be protected through conservation easements in the Whittlesey watershed.

The Refuge is adjacent to the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and its administrative offices are housed there. The Center is a regional visitor center for tourists, as well as a platform for area environmental education and interpretation. The Refuge is also adjacent to the Fish Creek Sloughs Management Area, owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Altogether, these agencies protect and manage approximately 1000 acres of coastal wetlands and streams on the south shore of Lake Superior. These coastal areas are significant habitats for many fish and wildlife of Lake Superior and surrounding watershed.

The Refuge was established in 1999 and is in its early stages of acquisition and planning. As of July 2001, 97 acres of the 540 have been acquired. Approximately 20 of these acres acquired include the mouth of Whittlesey Creek and its associated coastal wetlands. This area has traditionally been used by hunters for waterfowl hunting. We are proposing to open designated areas of the Refuge to waterfowl hunting.

### II. CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITIES

The Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge was established under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 USC 742(a)-754) for the purpose of:

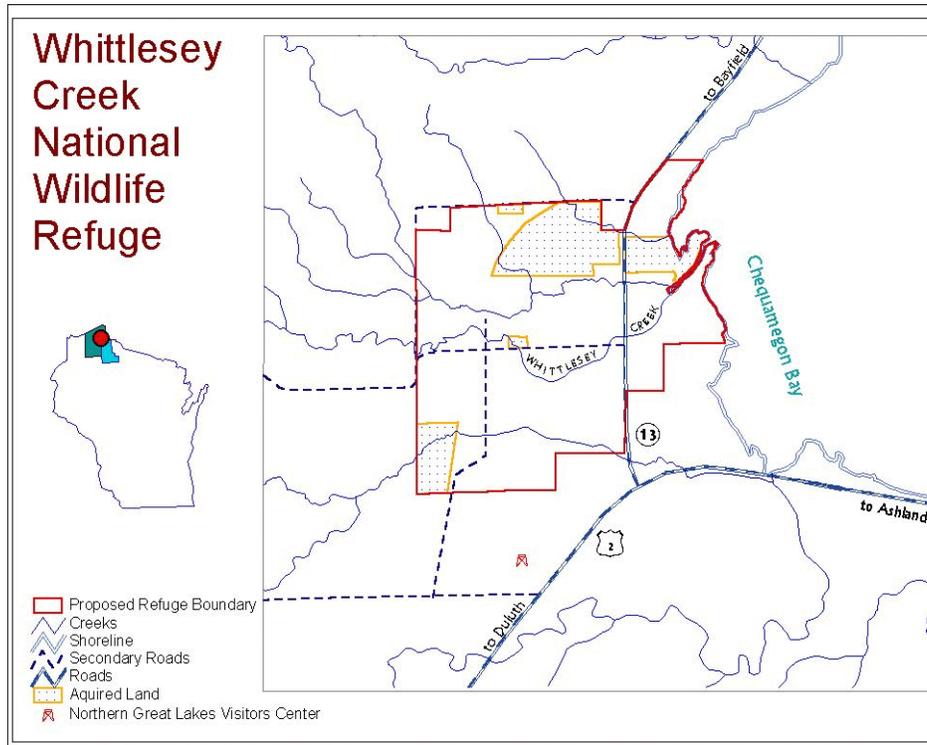
“... the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources.”

Our management objectives at Whittlesey Creek are to protect, restore, and manage a portion of the remaining coastal wetland and stream habitat within the largest and one of the most important coastal wetland complexes on Lake Superior.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act mandates that compatible, wildlife-

dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation are priority public uses. Waterfowl hunting at the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge will help fulfill of that mandate.

Figure 1. Location of Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge and Lands Acquired as of January 2002



No additional resources will be needed to administer waterfowl hunting. Current staff will inform the public about this proposed use. No additional facilities are needed.

### III. STATEMENT OF REFUGE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals for the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge include working with individuals, groups, and government entities to achieve the following:

- Protect and restore habitat in Whittlesey Creek, Little Whittlesey Creek, and Terwilliger Creek for migration, spawning, and rearing of anadromous trout and salmon from Lake Superior.
- Plan and implement a project to reintroduce coaster brook trout, under the guidance of the Lake Superior Brook Trout Rehabilitation Plan (Newman et al. 1999).

- Restore and manage habitat for waterfowl, neotropical migrants, and other migratory birds.
- Restore to the extent possible historical hydrologic conditions in the coastal wetlands and streams, including restoring Whittlesey Creek to its historic channel.
- Restore topography where altered by development, and enhance existing constructed ponds for wildlife values.
- Manage for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including environmental education, hunting, fishing, wildlife-viewing, and demonstrating restoration and management techniques.
- Conduct all management activities with an ecosystem approach in cooperation with agencies that manage adjacent and nearby lands and facilities.

The general philosophy of public use on the Refuge, including waterfowl hunting, is to provide an opportunity for public participation and to teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Opening designated areas of the refuge to waterfowl hunting are compatible with goals and this philosophy, because:

- 1) it will provide an opportunity for hunters to participate in use of the Refuge, which will help build support for the Refuge and the Service's mission,
- 2) it will have minimal impact on the resources of the Refuge,
- 3) it is positive result of the proper protection and management of important wetland and stream systems,
- 4) it is a traditional use on Refuge lands and provides priority wildlife-dependent recreation.

#### IV. ASSESSMENT

Waterfowl populations are not monitored within the Refuge, so populations estimates are not known. Neither are they monitored in the Lake Superior Basin of Northern Wisconsin. The region and the Refuge's important migratory birds are neotropical migrants, shorebirds, and colonial nesting birds. Waterfowl that is harvested are most likely birds that migrate from Ontario, Canada. Fall flight predictions and harvest regulations are based on waterfowl monitoring conducted in the U.S. and Canada and predictive models, not on local populations.

Migratory birds use coastal wetlands of Chequamegon Bay during the fall because they provide excellent food and vegetative cover. Waterfowl use during the fall migration is also found in open water of Chequamegon Bay. Hunting pressure and search for food moves diving ducks to the open water in the Bay, where large rafts are formed. Bluebills are comfortable on open waters searching for mollusks, fairy shrimp and other aquatic animals. Redheads and canvasback also prefer open water, but will search for aquatic vegetation. Dabblers have a tendency to find coastal and inland wetland areas that are not heavily hunted.

Because the land base for the Refuge is small, it would not be practical to manage migratory bird populations strictly within the Refuge. Hunting affects waterfowl populations mostly on a

regional and national basis. Harvest of waterfowl at the Refuge should not negatively affect the overall harvest and management needs the Service and the States establish for waterfowl populations on a regional and continent-wide basis. Waterfowl hunting, however, would increase movement of local populations out of the Refuge to other areas of the Chequamegon Bay.

## V. DESCRIPTION OF HUNTING PROGRAM

Waterfowl hunting will be allowed to take place on Refuge lands east of State Highway 13. Hunters will be required to follow all State and federal laws and regulations for hunting and waterfowl harvest. This includes no shooting within 100 yards of a residence without permission of the resident.

Ground or elevated blinds may be used if they do not damage live vegetation and are completely removed from the property each day at the close of the hunting hours. Ground blinds may be constructed entirely of dead vegetation from on the property.

Non-toxic shot is required for all shotgun use on the refuge.

The Service does not plan to limit use or require permits unless high demand creates safety concerns. We anticipate that most waterfowl hunters respect spacing needs between hunters and blinds and will essentially self-regulate themselves.

## VI. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

A. Biological Conflicts - Endangered Species, Section 7 consultation has been completed and an environmental assessment was written to cover all proposed public use on the Refuge, including hunting. There will be no effect on threatened or endangered species. Other migratory birds might be affected by disturbance during the hunting season, but populations should not be harmed. No mitigation is planned.

B. Public Use Conflicts - We do not anticipate user conflicts between hunters and non-consumptive users, until access is provided for the public to Lake Superior from a Refuge parking area. Currently, the only means to access the coastal wetlands and mouth of Whittlesey Creek is by boat from the lake or by walking down the bed of Whittlesey Creek. We will monitor use to determine if there are conflicts between hunters and anglers. If conflicts occur, we will determine if adjustments will be made to either hunting or angling within the Refuge.

C. Administrative Conflicts - There will be no administrative conflicts.

## VII. CONDUCT OF THE HUNT

A. Refuge-specific Hunting Regulations - There are none.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Hunt - Hunters who traditionally used this land before it became a refuge will be supportive. Some public will be surprised or disappointed, because there is the perception that a “refuge” means no hunting (see public comments received regarding public use in the Whittlesey Creek NWR Public Use Plan, dated April 6, 2001).

C. Hunter Application and Registration Procedures - Not applicable.

D. Description of Hunter Selection Process - Not applicable.

E. Media Selection for Announcing and Publicizing the Hunt - A public notice will be sent to all local newspapers in Ashland, Bayfield, Iron, and Douglas Counties, including the Bayfield County Journal and the Ashland Daily Press. Information will be posted on the Whittlesey Creek NWR internet home page. We will also contact the local rod and gun club, and post notices at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center and local Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources offices.

F. Description of Hunter orientation, Including Pre-hunt Scouting - Notices sent out will include maps or a description of how maps and regulations can be obtained.

G. Hunter Requirements

- 1) Age - Same as required by state regulations
- 2) Allowable equipment - Same as required by state regulations
- 3) Use of open fires (for cooking, warmth) - None allowed
- 4) License and permits - Federal duck stamp and Wisconsin state license required.
- 5) Reporting harvest - None required.
- 6) Hunter training and safety - Same as required by state regulations.

## VII. REFERENCES

Newman, L.E., R.B. Dubois, and T.N. Halpern (Eds.). 1999. A brook trout rehabilitation plan for Lake Superior. Great Lakes Fish. Comm. 28 p.